

"Cleaning up" for Winnipeg's Pan Am Games

BY RODNEY GRAHAM

WINNIPEG, M.B. - The Pan Am Games begin in Winnipeg July 23, 1999. It will be the third largest sporting event in North American history. An estimated 5,100 athletes, 41 sporting events and 2000 media correspondents reaching an audience of over 400 million.

It promises to be exciting, impressive - even record-breaking. But the human rights community is not excited. They're angry.

Some in the community have likened the games to a "Potemkin Village" - a fairy tale about a poor village whose governors wanted to impress visiting dignitaries. They built temporary facades that looked pretty. The 'inspector generals' came - were impressed, left - and the residents who actually lived in poverty, starved.

"A dozen buildings have been torn down - some were old hotels that catered to low-income

tenants. Tenants were given 72 hours notice. More are slated for demolition... A healthy society represents all levels of society," Nick Ternette, a leading political analyst and human rights activist in Winnipeg says. "When educated, mature people refer to panhandlers, homeless youths as 'pests', a 'plague', an 'infestation', a 'virus', something is very wrong with our society."

This glut of lawmaking is directly related to the Pan Am games," Ternette says, referring to the panhandler bylaw (1995) (which is being challenged); the squeegee-kid bylaw (1998); the anti-graffiti bylaw (1998); and the vagrancy bylaw, also implemented in 1998.

This is a 'cleansing' process. The anti-graffiti bylaw and the squeegee punks bylaw are aimed at graffiti artists and squeegee punks who are parts of society who are often oppressed and as a result, anti-government."

Ternette said the city doesn't want tourists to see an attack on kids...including subculture artists so... the vagrancy bylaw (which was overturned by John Rogers and other activists in 1968) has been brought back. "And it will be used selectively," said Ternette.

According to Ternette the V.I.P. program (vagrants, intoxicated, and panhandlers) is also unethical - police are co-opting the social services and/or advocacy groups into being accomplices of the police in dubious legislation - in criminalizing the poor.

"The poor may not be arrested," says Ternette "but will be pushed away from the downtown."

Joe Bova, developer, and a spokesman for The North Main Revitalization Task Force disagrees with Ternette. Joe called the redevelopment of Main Street projects a "people's revolution".

"There's not many people left on the street, we need something to attract 'new people' through proper marketing. We have to put the focus back on the commercial development of Main Street," says Bova.

"Look at who will be coming to the games," said Pauline Riley, of the National Anti Poverty Organization (the group challenging the panhandler bylaw). "They will be the elite the wealthy. All people have the right to be on the street - whether rich or poor."

Mike Farrell, assistant director of N.A.P.O. in Ottawa agrees - "Across Canada, the attitude of the cities is 'let's make them disappear and then we won't have to deal with the issue of poverty,'" said Farrell.

Reverend Doug Woods, overseer of the Church of the Nazarene Mission, "Siloam Mission", is becoming a thorn in the side of the developers by refusing to sell their mission.

"The developers won't benefit the people the mission is serving," says Rev. Doug Woods, "it will displace them. They don't have a strong voice. This property is valuable as well as being a place of acceptance of the city's offer to build a new community where we want to be. Our church is where we need to be."

Sadly, however, Mr. Woods says the city will not be enough. City Hall has ordered the demolition of his mission as well as five other "hold outs."



The people of Siloam Mission. This is where we need to be," says Rev. Doug Woods, fourth from right, on the top. PHOTOS: Rodney Graham.

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Our Voice

the spare change magazine

Ken Trudeau: life & death of a disabled Albertan

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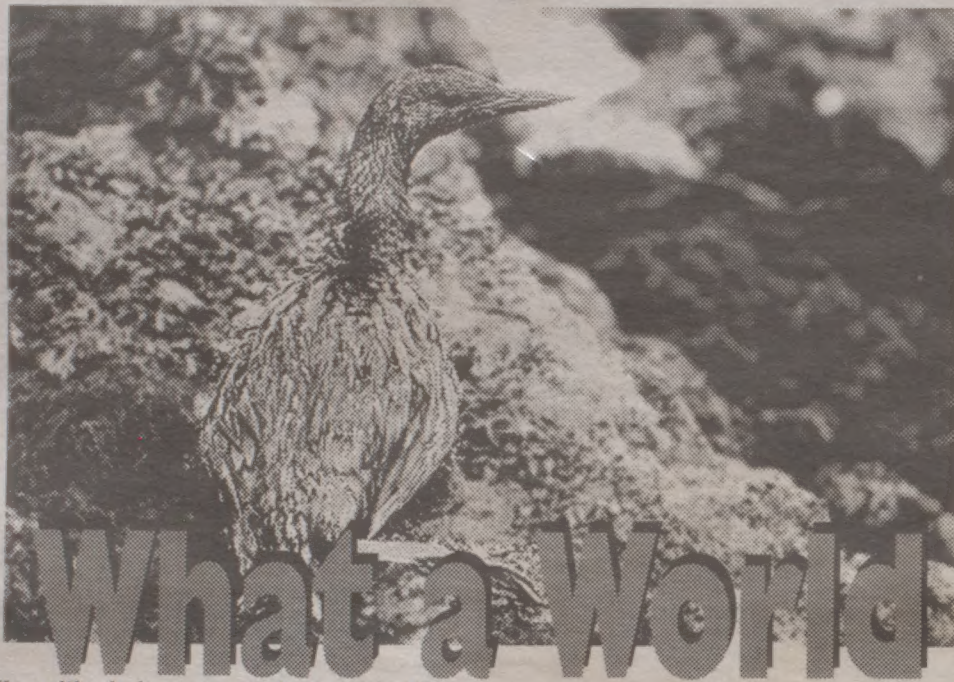
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COMMENTARY

BY CHARLIE MEADOWS

So we found out recently that it's okay for a man in British Columbia to possess child pornography. And my, oh my, have the pro-children voices come a surgin'. Me, well I think any guy who loves child pornography so much that he'd actually have a stash of it and defend his right to have that stash in a court of law is pretty... well just plain freaky. But what gets me is all of these people who say they're upset because this is terrible for the children. "I can't believe we live in a society that would treat children this badly and rule in favour of a pervert," some have been heard to say. It is terrible abuse of the children. There is much other child abuse too in the world. We shop at stores, and have been doing so for years, that sell products made by little kids as young as six years old in third world countries. Government people have expressed their dismay with the B.C. court ruling, saying that we need to protect our most valuable resource at any cost. Protect the children! But yet these governments will readily do business with countries like China and Indonesia where child labour is rampant. I'm against child pornography like most people are, but if we're going to talk about protecting our children, let's be consistent.

Oil soaked seabird comes out of the ocean.



And how about poor ol' Wiebo Ludwig and Richard Boonstra. So the authorities figure they pose a danger to the rest of us. Now the two burly woodsmen sit locked away behind cold metal bars.

"The detention of both accused is necessary for the protection of the public and maintaining confidence of the public," said Grande Prairie provincial court Judge E.D. Riemer. Funny though how these two men who have over and over again displayed obvious and unquestioned concern for the well being of their families and their communities would be considered such a threat to mankind. While at the same time the oil and gas industry, for as long as it has thrived in this province, has done nothing but rape and pillage our environment and pollute the air we breathe. (One company has even began reimbursing farmers for the damage its sour gas wells have caused to their cattle.) Sure they have created numerous jobs and temporarily secured the futures of many Alberta families, but then again they have always been the

willing recipients of government handouts that take away from much needed social expenses such as education. So I guess what I'm saying is that when I hear that someone bombs a gas well every now and then and no one gets hurt, which no one ever has, well maybe I won't say. What would really seem fair, however, would be if David E. Newell (C.E.O. Syncrude) or Richard George (Suncor) were detained for the threat they pose to the rest of us, a threat that is a lot more serious than the one Weibo and Richard are accused of.

Just for fun let's combine two recent news stories. There is now a threat that the provincial government will disassemble the current benefits program for disabled folks, AISH. This is because a few people were found to have more money in assets than the government thinks they should have. It seems like another example of attacking the poor to save money. The second story is Ralph Klein recently embarking on a ten day trade tour of the U.S. and Mexico in which he is leading Alberta business men by the hand

to help them establish profitable business contacts in those countries. The ten day tour will cost Alberta tax payers more than \$45,000. \$45,000 would be a year's income for five AISH recipients. So while the government figures they are wasting money on supporting our most vulnerable people, they feel they can justify the fact that million dollar companies like the Mecca Media Group, an Aerospace design outfit, needs to suckle the public teet in order to increase profits.

While on the topic of pornography and disability, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Hustler Magazine's Larry Flint. As you know good ol' Larry is buying names of Republicans who have committed infidelities far greater than the one committed by President Bill and is releasing them one by one as public knowledge. It sure is ironic that the only true representation of democracy in this whole fiasco is coming from a porno publisher.

What a world.

Charlie Meadows is an occasional commentary contributor to *Our Voice*. Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers or editors. People are invited to respond to anything they read in *Our Voice*.

Check out our links!
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On the WEB

Check out **Our Voice** on the internet. We have set up a small introductory World Wide Web site for people around the world to read a bit about Alberta and people here.

Our Voice on the internet, our voice to the world!

The WEB site is also a good place to email us feedback about the magazine.

So check out **Our Voice** on the WEB.

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Our Voice the spare change magazine

Ken Trudeau:

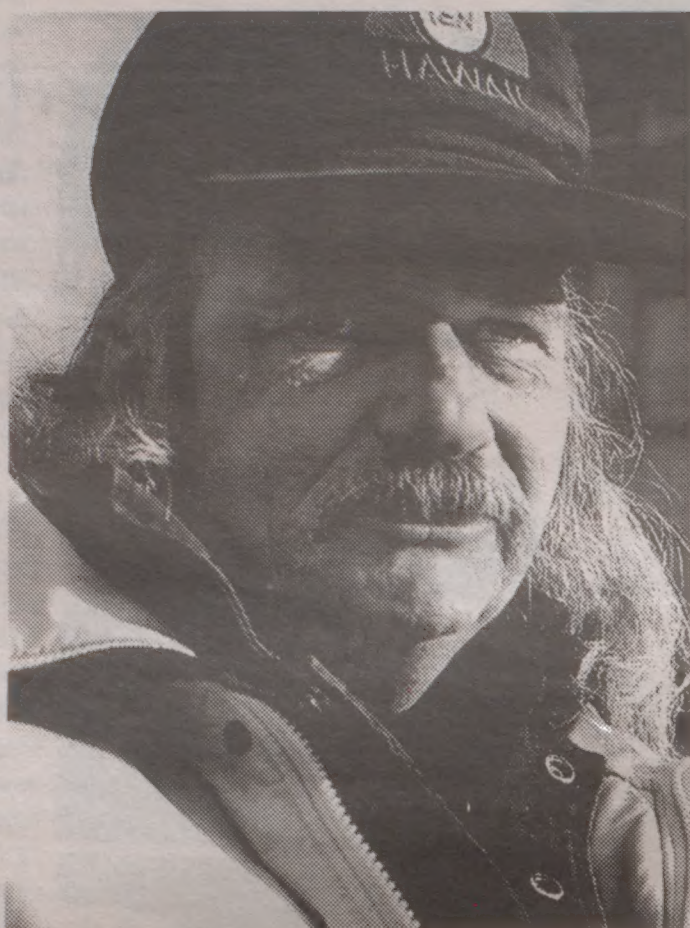
The life & death of a disabled Albertan

BY MICHAEL WALTERS

I first met Ken when I came to Our Voice as the distribution manager more than three years ago. He was not unlike many of the people who sell this magazine to make or add to their livings. For most of our vendors there is something that leads them our way, whether it be mental illness, a physical handicap, an overwhelmingly difficult past and in some cases, substance abuse issues.

For Ken the problem was he didn't have the use of his legs. He lived his life in his wheelchair as a result of a work-related accident. Having no other skills, other than those that employed him in the labour force, he was unable to support himself.

During the time that I knew Ken, I didn't know



Ken Trudeau, an Our Voice vendor, died alone and poor in 1996. PHOTO: Pieter de Vos Jr.

him to have any family or close friends who he relied upon for support. He was on his own. He lived alone and he traveled through his days alone. Ken struggled through the years going off and on welfare and off and on AISH. Even that support was intermittent. In his leanest times, he depended solely on his sales of Our Voice to get by.

Ken died in the fall of 1996. He had been dead for two weeks before he was discovered in his apartment.

After the accident Ken was always poor. He struggled and worked hard to keep a roof over his head. He knew that his chances of survival on the streets in his condition were slim. Having an apartment was extremely important to him, I suppose as it is with everybody. But we all know housing isn't cheap if you're living on somewhere around \$600-800 a month. After the rent is paid, there is nothing left over for adequate food, a phone, and necessities. There is no room each month to save or secure a future. For Ken, and for thousands of other Albertans, being disabled meant being helpless, poor and fighting day after day for mere survival. It would be a difficult task for the healthiest of us to survive on \$600 a month, but for someone in a wheelchair, where most options are cut off, it would be impossible. It proved to be impossible for Ken. He didn't make it and he was only in his late forties when he died. There are many people out there with circumstances similar to Ken's. These are people who suffer with illness and disability and suffer alone in poverty.

I recall Ken as a very kind man and I was saddened with news of his death. Now I feel more angered by the fact that he didn't have to die.

For the rest of the world, Ken's life is shadowy, a vague tragedy, an unimportant life, not valued the way it should have been. But Ken was a human being. He was a person, one with a disability and we could say, without much uncertainty, that's what killed him. ♦

I worked with Ken from October 1995 to the time he died in 1996. All the information above is based on conversations I recall having with Ken and the things I came to know about him.

AISH UNDERSTANDING OBERG'S TRUE AGENDA

Goldie Stewart is on AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) and was one of the 500 people who attended a recent meeting about proposed changes to the AISH benefit program. She has not been able to pay her phone bill for three months. "That's my only outlet, because I have cerebral palsy". Now things could be getting even worse for disabled Albertans.

In January, Dr. Lyle Oberg, Alberta Minister of Social Services, revealed plans to cut back AISH in order to instill work incentives for the disabled. The new program is named, "Open Doors", and would pay new disabled only \$610/month, and require them to apply for extra benefits. The present AISH clients usually get \$823/month. In addition the present asset level is decreased to \$20,000, and for the new disabled applicants to \$5000. Much to the public's dismay, provincial cabinet had already approved the hidden program last November.

Disabled people fear that Oberg's "secret agenda" is to decrease present AISH levels quickly if there is no public outcry, and slowly even if there is. The disabled point out that it is impossible to incite them to work, since they cannot. The disabled know that applying for "extras" will lead to bureaucratic abuse. And a perception has been born that the disabled are lazy. Society used to torture the disabled because they were "possessed by the devil"; now it does so because they are deemed "lazy".

Some speculate that the unspoken reasoning of the provincial Progressive Conservatives is that this will create an incentive for the low earner to work. It is an economic truism that if you lower the minimum wage simply by not raising it with the cost of living, and the person is doing the same work, "productivity"

automatically increases. What Oberg is implying instead is that higher work incentives for the disabled would increase productivity.

Since 1996, there has been a "growing gap marketplace", where a growing portion of new jobs are very low-paying. The minimum wage earner makes only \$5.40/hour, \$782 net/month, less than someone on AISH, but should make \$8.78/hour to be at the poverty level called LICO (Low-income cut off) of \$1128 net/month.

Regina Parker has already endured years of struggle trying to collect support for her disability. She suffers from a variety of problems that have left her in a wheelchair; problems such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, osteoarthritis, diabetes, diabetic neuropathy, and asthma.

"Because I can't prove that my disability is permanent, I don't qualify for AISH. I get what is called Assured Income, which is still like welfare. I only receive \$529 a month. It's very discouraging that the government thinks we don't need enough money for a decent standard of living. This contradicts the Universal Declaration of Human rights," Regina says. Regina read Article 25-1 of the covenant at the recent meeting of the disabled community:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." ♦

by Kasandra Caldwell

Community action strategies that came out of the January 20 meeting of Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD):

- Phone Lyle Oberg before the February 8 deadline,
- Phone all the Progressive Conservative Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), or just your MLA, before February 8,
- Send a letter to Oberg and the MLAs by February 8, telling them to:
- Keep the AISH program for the future,
- Improve the AISH income level to the LICO,
- Allow quick re-entry to AISH if working fails, those who try to work,
- Increase the minimum wage to \$8.78, the LICO,
- Support the stronger idea of national standards for social programs, rather than the weaker idea of a "social union" of the provinces,
- Support true work incentives, not 75% claw backs,
- Appeal everything that Social Services refuses you,
- Come to poverty groups, disability groups, advocacy groups, etc.
- Attend the important rally on February 16 at the Legislative grounds, for the first government sitting. Phone Regina or Gary at Poverty in Action for more details, 990-1840, and leave a message and number, and
- Get an invitation from your MLA, and be announced at the Question Period in the Legislature, starting February 16.

GLOBALIZATION'S EFFECT ON OUR ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POOR

Our Voice writer and vendor *Kassandra Caldwell* has given us her personal insight, looking at the effects of the world's push toward global economics and attitudes. This is part 1 of a 3 part series.

I am a person who is on assistance. It is not enough to live on. So, I sell **Our Voice** magazines, even though that is a painful experience. People donate money to me, not just because they are buying a magazine, but because they want me, a plain old welfare recipient who cannot do more, to simply stay alive. They value my basic humanity.

In 1986, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) was at the Poverty Line (now called the Low Income Cutoff), which is \$1128/month (after deductions). But today it is \$304/month too low, due to deficits, Alberta government cutbacks, poor-bashing, fear of socialism, and globalization hysteria.

When deficits began to get really big in the late 1970s, the right wing powers blamed social programs. Actually, it was the lowered taxation of corporations that caused the deficits, not the poor and middle-class. Ontario called their cutback program, "the common-sense revolution".

It is globalization which is the great bugaboo held on to by corporations as a reason to increase their profits and power against the middle-class and the poor.

Unfashionable to Support the Poor

It is difficult and unfashionable to support poverty issues these days. The majority of the population in Canada now has hard views against the poor and oppressed. I have a degree in Economics, and I know that we have to pay down the debt and eliminate the deficits. I know that we should work for our keep, and that a good economy requires that the majority of adults be productive workers. I suspect, too, that some welfare people are not pulling their weight, and that they are sometimes expecting too much tax money to support their basic right to live.

However, we all know that the globalization of the world's economies has sharply lessened our chances of making a good wage, especially since the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), 1987, and the subsequent free trade agreement with Mexico. So we have scrambled for a better and more practical education, so that we can stay competitive and earn a good living. In the meantime, corporations are blithely turning to third world countries for low-paid workers to do our work, ignoring our commitment to a decent standard of living.

Consequently, not only have our wages suffered, but also our confidence in our ability to earn a middle-class income and to pay enough taxes to support a guaranteed annual income at the poverty line. We do not even want to support a mini-

POVERTY meets GLOBALIZATION



Kassandra Caldwell, Our Voice vendor, in front of the Hong Kong Bank of Canada in Edmonton.

mum wage at the poverty line (\$7.15/hour). Because we've had to entrench into a maintenance of our old standard of living, we do not see or care what is happening to others less fortunate in Canada. We are angry at our own diminished prospects, and cannot think of others.

An Example of Poor-Bashing

Recently, an Edmonton Journal's writer, Lorne Gunter, wrote that we Canadian poor are asking for too much: after all, a third world poor person makes only \$200/month. Would he like his elderly mother or disabled sister to make \$200/month in Canada?

He also said that the reason why people are poor is that they do not know how to invest. I have a degree in Economics. I know how to invest. I cannot invest because I am disabled and poor. How do I invest on \$824/month? How does an ordinary welfare recipient invest on \$524/month? How does a middle class earner invest after high taxes and living expenses, which corporations and investors do not have to pay?

We Believe What the New Global Corporations Tell Us

While many corporations blame the new communications economy, or computer technology, for our upset, we would hardly be suffering at all without the recent free trade agreements. Otherwise, we would just have had to re-educate and change our careers. It is free trade that has lowered our standard of living. Additionally, dependence on the views of corporations has constrained our own global view.

We believe what corporations tell us. They say that the poor are "biologically and evolutionarily inferior", unable to hold up the country through productivity, and need not

be supported in this more difficult, global economy. But, as a speaker at a recent conference on globalization said, "When you can't find enough to eat, remember it is not an individual problem, it is a Canadian and global problem".

Aside from the productivity issue, when will we come back to the ideal that people deserve to be supported at the poverty level simply because they are human beings and we want them to live?

We also believe corporations when they tell us that globalization requires us to "compete with lower, third-world-level wages". That means, they tell us, that we cannot afford to support the poor at the poverty level anymore. And it also implies that we cannot aspire to higher wages and an improved standard of living.

Contrary to what many will tell us, we remain an educated, productive, technologically developed people. We are able to compete by providing high wages, we can also support the poor at a decent standard of living. We can stop paying exorbitant taxes and force corporate-type incomes to be taxed fairly, higher, given their innate, lower-taxed status. We also can force other countries to pay people their fair share.

Next issue in Part 2 Kassandra goes on to discuss myths about attracting industry, examples of corporate welfare and the United Nation's view of globalization.



Our Voice is really down to earth.

My husband and I have been buying *Our Voice* since it's inception. We look forward to it on a regular basis. We buy it from all the various vendors in the Strathcona area. I find the vendors to be extremely professional and the magazine as well. I find it to be really down to earth in many ways. I think it really shows what life is about and for those of us who may be working and lucky enough to have a job right now, it's a great reality check of where we could certainly be at any point in time. So thank you for that reality check and continued good luck because I'm sure that your magazine is as important in other people's lives as it is in ours.

Barbara

Butting out in hospitals

Hot on the heels of the government's proposed changes to the AISH program, which is another cut from people

already living below the poverty level, comes Capital Health's news release that there will no longer be smoking in or outside of hospitals. We went from non-smokers having no rights to smokers having no rights. Isn't there a middle ground somewhere? Not having a designated smoking area in hospitals will add stress to individuals already over-stressed because of their illness in a situation in which they have no choice - namely a place they must be in order to be given the medical care they need. Smokers are well aware of the hazards to their health, but at least God gives everyone a choice. This government does not. They make decisions behind closed doors and if they ask for our opinion at all, it is after the fact. And I thought we lived in a democracy? Suprise! Surprise!

Beth Burns Edmonton

Reformers against poor people?

In your talking back section I read the comment stating

that Reformers are against poor people. I find this comment to be unkind, untrue, and uninformed. My mother and I purchase your magazine from your vendors, and we are Reformers. We are certain that many other Reformers assist your vendors as well.

Anonymous

Quality of magazine getting better

I don't think it's my imagination, in the years your magazine has been out on the street, I would say that your quality of writing has gotten better. I'm quite amazed at the thoughtful commentary and the all around good writing of your contributors. I wish there was a twice monthly edition, I'd buy every one of them like I do now. Keep up the good work. I pay as much as I can for every issue and I'm glad to do it.

Allan B.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.

Call and leave your comment: 1-888-428-4001 Toll Free

Poverty causes crime and violence

They say that "crime doesn't pay". Well some people say that it pays better than welfare, it pays better than unemployment and it pays better than minimum wage here in Alberta, the apparent land of prosperity.

Mr. A., I'll call him, is a fellow I spoke with in a downtown coffee shop a while back. Mr. A. has never spent a day of his life in jail, but he's counting his blessings. Through his life he has stolen a variety of things and sold drugs to pay the bills. All the while he has either been working or has been on unemployment and at the worst times, has lived on the streets with no income at all.

"I'm sure most people would say that I'm born bad, that I have no respect for the law or that I'm just too lazy to work so I take from others, but I've had jobs where at the end of the two weeks the cheque was too small to meet costs, so I pinched a bit, or I would need to get a line of credit on some dope and then usually I could keep my family housed and fed. No one wants to be poor and by poor I mean unable to eat or pay rent," says Mr. A. "When I have been on the streets, it's hard to pull yourself out. I was lucky. I had a couple of big scores so I could get back into an apartment and get a phone and eventually a car so I could look for work. It's hard to find a job if you're homeless and don't have a phone or any money to make resumes or take the bus around to hand out applications."

According to the Edmonton Police Service web site (www.edmonton.police.ab.ca), crime rates in the categories of robbery, break and enter, theft and vehicle theft are highest in those areas of the city that are the poorest. For example, Boyle Street which is usually considered to be Edmonton's poorest community has the highest average of these types of crimes. Areas such as Westmount, Jasper Place, Beverly and Belvedere all rank among the neighbourhoods with high crime rates. This makes sense. A poor and desperate person is likely more inclined to go beyond the law in order to survive. Of course if you have money, you have little need to steal it, but if you have none and your options are limited, you'll get it anyway you can.

Mr. A. figures that many people who steal, especially younger people, like teenagers, view crime as easier money than working hard long days for a nasty boss.

With such a low minimum wage in Alberta, people can probably make more money in a life of crime than they could walking the so-called straight road. It's a scary thought.

For violent crimes the trends are similar. Poverty is a stresser that fuels domestic violence and violent outbursts.

"It's important to realize that family violence cuts across all socioeconomic levels. But poverty is another added stress that increases the chance of violence," says Anne Fitzpatrick from the Family Violence Prevention Centre. "There is little counseling that is free of charge, so those who are poor are less able to work through problems compared to families who are better off."

Carol McPherson, a front line worker at the Bissell Centre says that "poor people who use the centre are often frustrated by dealing with the system and are very burdened. They often feel like they get little respect in the community so the anger builds. Then it comes out in other ways. It's usually very displaced anger and violence caused by deeper issues."

There's little doubt that high rates of criminal activity are a big social concern and are often dealt with in a reactionary fashion. We fill our prisons and rehabilitation facilities to the brim and many people who have spent time incarcerated will admit that this time only made their lives worse, not better. We need to start looking at preventative measures. If we had a society that offered all citizens a fair, supportive and decent standard of living, the amount of crime and violence we experience in our communities would decrease drastically.

Michael Walters

Editorial OPINION

Our Voice

the spare change magazine

Forced into the indignity of poverty?

We've seen this kind of offensive before. Dr. Lyle Oberg started off the recent one with a claim that millionaires are collecting AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) payments from the government. It turns out that the Minister of Family and Social Services is actually planning to use strict new regulations to cut many people off AISH, and reduce benefits for everyone on the program, millionaires or not. But he kicked off his offensive, and it really is offensive, with another "welfare cheat" charge, an emotional claim that's geared to creating public resentment of people who receive government assistance.

Well, it worked before. Citing cases of "abuse" of the welfare system, the Alberta government went ahead and made drastic changes that forced thousands of people off welfare, and cut welfare payments for everyone else, deserving or not. The "reforms" have caused tremendous hardship for many families and driven poverty levels in the province to new lows of desperation. The government saved millions of dollars on its welfare costs, but at a huge human cost.

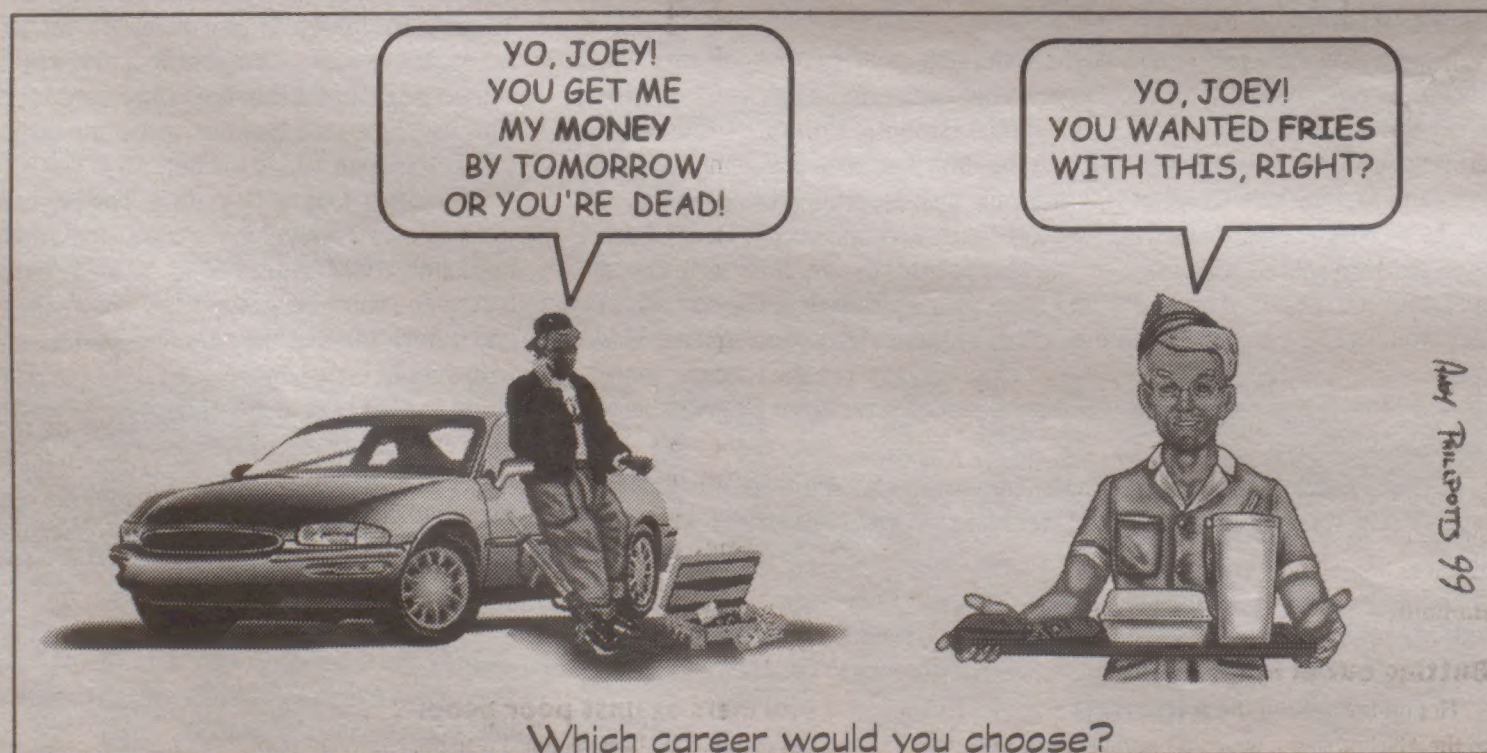
Now they are turning the public relations exercise on the disabled.

We know we have a government whose main priority is reducing government, and turning as much over to the private sector as possible. They don't believe in government social services generally, and apparently would like to hand all the responsibility to charitable agencies. But they may have gone too far picking on disabled people. These are people who can't be labelled "lazy" and can't be blamed for the fact that they have a disability and cannot work and pay their own way. The government's leaked policy paper on AISH plans to put disabled people onto welfare where they'll get \$610 a month, down from \$823 a month on AISH. (A single employable person gets only about \$390 a month on welfare.) And a new means test would keep people from getting anything until their savings or any money they have is all gone. It's forced poverty.

Imagine, if you will, that you were disabled in an accident. You're unable to work in your career and you are struggling to rebuild your life. But, you're lucky. You get an insurance settlement, say \$250,000, a nice nest egg. That money is not going to support you for the rest of your life, maybe ten years, but not much longer. Then, when you're broke you may be eligible for AISH, or welfare, and eligible for desperate poverty. Not so lucky after all. But if you had been getting income support from the government your nest egg would have ensured a reasonable living.

Should people who need government support have to be desperately poor before they get it? The Alberta government seems to think so and is ready to spur its citizens on to the same conclusion. Maybe this time Albertans won't buy it.

Keith Wiley



A lifer's story

Freddie has found the freedom inside of himself, but still sits locked away

BY DONNA LAPRETRE

For Freddie, prison wasn't rehabilitation. It was a school of crime. Freddie first went to jail when he was fourteen. He and some friends got caught stealing from a local store. Because he was a big kid, he was held in provincial jail for six months until they realized he was not more than eighteen, but only fourteen. But by then he had learned the ropes.

He spent the rest of his time until he was sixteen in juvenile jail. From the ages of sixteen to twenty-nine he spent most of his time locked up as well; mostly for stealing, assaults (fighting) and similar charges.

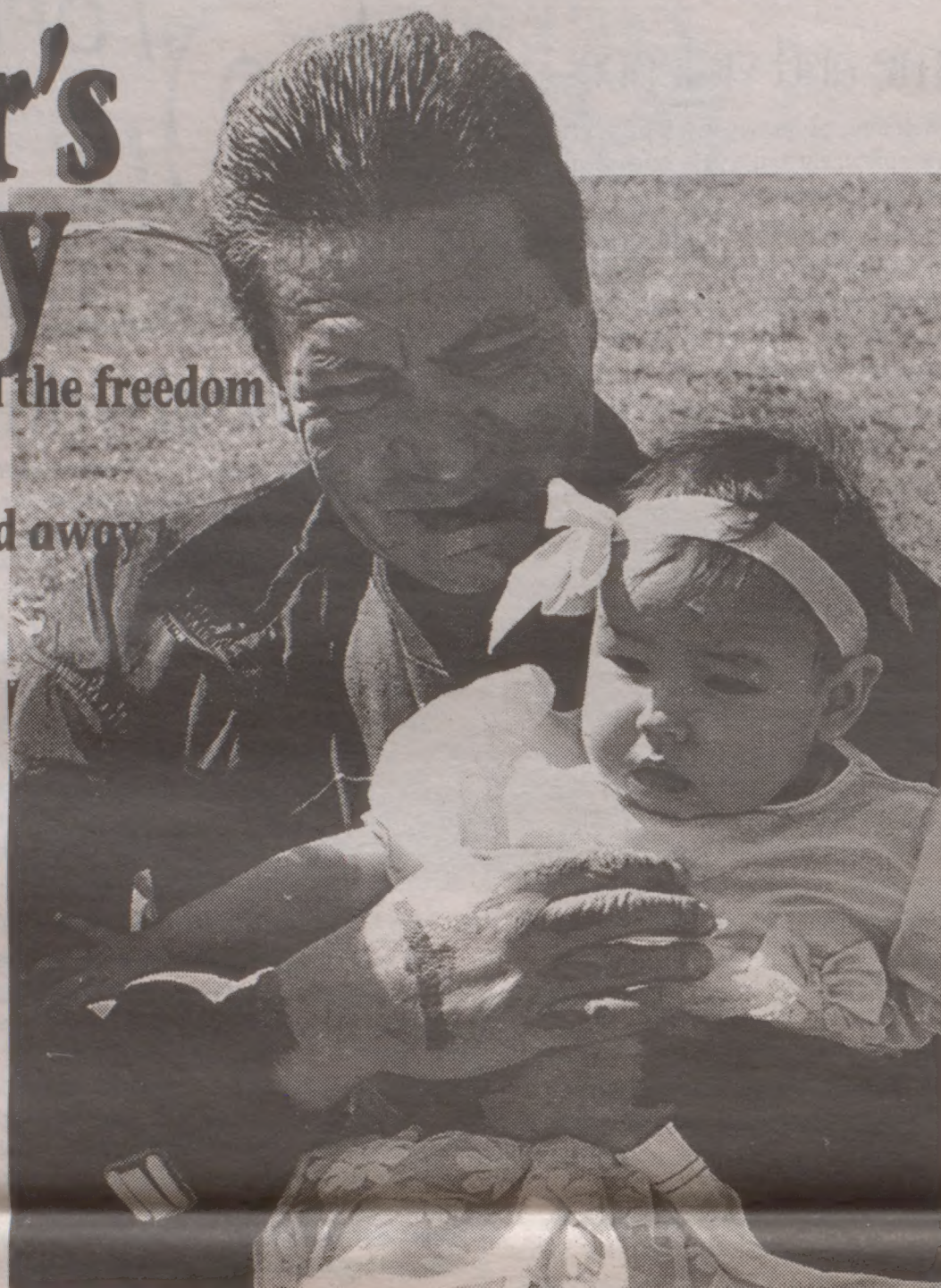
Now Freddie is fifty-eight years old and doing a life-twenty sentence. When Freddie was twenty-nine, he was arrested in Vancouver for armed robbery. He was trying to get money to feed a heroin habit. By that time he'd already done at least ten years in federal penitentiaries and had made a name for himself as a solid "con".

In 1974 Freddie fought with another inmate who was armed with a knife. Freddie had a baseball bat and the other inmate died in the fight. It was in 1974 that Corrections Canada increased the time to be served for murder from life-15 to life-20. Freddie was the first person to be handed the life-20 sentence. Life-20 means that the person must serve two-thirds of a 20-year sentence, before being eligible for parole.

"I spent five and a half years straight in the hole (solitary confinement), when the hole was really a hole," Freddie says. "I did twelve and a half years in the hole in my time. I spend a lot of time in the Special Handling Unit (SPU). You're always 'on point', having to watch your back all the time. I've been paddled, piped. Your adrenalin hits the heights when you hear nine guards coming down the hall and you know they're coming for you. I've lost touch with the outside world. I don't know anything about responsibility. I've had no visits or very little mail. Lots of my family are dead now and I couldn't go to their funerals. It really hurt me when they wouldn't let me go to my Grandmother's funeral. They (Correctional Services Canada-CSC) said the relationship wasn't close enough. But she was my "mom". My real Mother told me that she died kissing some prayer beads I'd given her and crying for me."

In 1986 Freddie was transferred to the Edmonton Maximum Security Prison. In 1992 Freddie was sent to the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon for a second time.

"I finally started making changes in my life then. They helped me start dealing with my past. When I was sent back to Edmonton, Peter O'Chiese came to talk to me. Peter is a very wise elder. He taught me that it's okay to cry. He took me back to my native culture and spirituality."



Freddie jiggles little Cheyanne Donna Marie on his knee.

Freddie speaks openly about his childhood and it's typical of many people like him, who have spent most of their lives in prison.

"People always ask me how I got started on this downhill slide. I don't know. I was raised by my Grandparents with a few other cousins, Aunts and Uncles. My Grandfather was hard on us kids. He was very strict. We had to fish and hunt and trap with him so I didn't get much education. I went to a residential school and hated it. They were mean. I could hardly speak English. I couldn't cry to my Grandmother because my Uncles would tease me for being a sissy. Men don't cry. I always went to church with my Grandmother and was an alter boy for four years. When I was ten, an Uncle sexually abused me. When I was eleven an Aunt also abused me. We were very poor, living in a shack, but there was always enough to eat. Jail was like a hotel to me," Freddie says.

From his youth Freddie remembers a chilling story. When he was six, he recognized that his Aunts and Uncles drank a lot. One of his Uncles used to always bring a bottle of something home from the store and drink it. So Freddie went to the grocery store and swiped a bottle of what he knew his Uncle liked. He gave it to him as a present. His Uncle drank it and died.

Freddie then of course always thought he'd killed his Uncle. But Peter O'Chiese got him to open up. Freddie had never told anyone anything about it. He'd carried that guilt with him his entire life.

Freddie has spent forty of his fifty-eight years on this Earth in jail. He has missed most Christmases, Easters and other celebrations. He has missed his life. In its place is violence, confinement and stark loneliness textured with steel bars and concrete walls. Freddie believes he has served his time and paid his debt. But the system won't let go of Freddie's reputation.

"I'm having a lot of trouble getting out. The worst part is never knowing when. There are no time lines. I was supposed to be taken out on passes to get used to the outside world again. Then I was transferred to Drumheller four years ago. It didn't happen. Those were release plans laid out before the transfer. We get release plans set up, but as soon as I'm sent to a new institution or get a new case worker, the rules change. I probably hold the record for doing the most time in Canada, so they use the excuse that I'm institutionalized. I know that. But it won't change unless they start taking me out. All of my psychological reports since 1992 have been positive. I know I can do it. The elders help me keep strong. I pray a lot. But every new case worker looks at my past and ignores all the positive things I've done since 1992. Instead of accepting the word of my elders who are my psychological and spiritual leaders, they ignore their advice. Natives know about natives and it hurts me that they don't respect them, yet they're the ones having success with people. Case workers keep trying to manipulate me to take programs; programs I've taken so many times I could teach them. My dream is to be an elder like Peter O'Chiese and help young people stay away from drugs, alcohol and a life of crime. I want to sleep with my wife in my arms and know she'll be there in the morning. We'll take a walk, go to church, get to know my family, go on picnics, see the stampede, ride a horse again, shop for groceries-ordinary things. I've done more than my time. CSC seems to be out for revenge, not justice and certainly not rehabilitation. I wish I could afford a lawyer." ♦

Donna Laperte is married to Freddie. Donna has come forth wishing to tell her husband's story and in following issues she will share with us her own story and those of other lifetime prisoners and their families.

The hardest fight I have ever fought has been to be myself

A REFLECTION ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

by Linda Dumont

"Why doesn't she just leave?" It's the pat question asked about any woman living in a violent situation. It's a question I still ask myself when I think about my own past. I don't have an answer. I feel outrage, sorrow, regret and beyond that, a sense of wonder. How could I have allowed my now ex-husband to do the things he did, and protect his often criminal behaviour with a blanket of silence?

Why didn't I just leave?

At first I did try to run away. After the first beating, I ran across the campsite where we were on our honeymoon. He caught up with me, ripped off half my clothes, and brought me back to the trailer. I didn't lie to the police - I just said nothing. The second time, I ran down a flight of stairs and into a plate glass door, shattering the glass. He caught up with me on the other side of the street.

We had been married four months when he tried to kill me. I regained consciousness in the hospital with him at my bedside.

"You've been released," he said. I never saw the doctor. We went home in a cab. He guarded me night and day, even moving the TV into the bedroom. I waited three days until he ran out of cigarettes. As soon as he left, I limped to the medicine cabinet and took all the pills from the shelves. I was in bed taking them when he returned. He took the pills, preventing my escape for a third time.

He always made me promise not to tell anyone. It was a promise I kept.

"If you tell anyone or try to leave, I will find you and kill you." I believed he was capable of doing it.

I even felt responsible for his actions, as though I was to blame for turning him into a monster. I was bound by promises and the vows I had taken.

I lived as a survivor. I said "yes" to whatever my husband wanted, and kept my thoughts to myself. I lived without hopes and dreams, or plans for a future, with unmourned losses and denial.

My husband controlled the finances, beginning with my first pay cheque after our wedding. He went with me to the bank and took charge of the money.

He did the grocery shopping. He made the decisions as to where we lived, and arranged the furniture in his homes. I never really felt anything was mine - I simply used the things we had.

What was mine was his, what was his was his. He wore gold jewelry and fancy cowboy boots; the rest of the family wore cheap running shoes. He had his own locked fridge for his special treats.

Whatever I did, he found fault with. He claimed to be a better housewife than I was, and a better cook.

He played mind games, watching what we did and twisting things to mean whatever he wanted, even making up lies about the things people were saying, building up mistrust, suspicion and isolation. He even used God to get his own way by twisting the scriptures to his advantage. His God was another means of control.

I have been reclaiming my soul.
I had to forgive everything,
even forgive myself for the
things which I allowed.

Finally I left with the children. I stayed with friends until I could get social assistance and find an apartment.

At first, I felt like a person who didn't exist. I had spent years living in reaction to someone else. I started having flashbacks where I relived repressed emotions from the past, emotions it had not been safe to express. I would be overcome by heart pounding terror or utter rejection. These could be triggered by any number of things, seeing a program on T.V., reading a book or a news story, feeling threatened, an unpleasant encounter with someone, even criticism. A counselor told me this was normal considering the extreme violence I had lived with.

I had difficulty making decisions even about simple things. Buying anything for myself was the hardest. I made bad decisions, leaving too much to others, and trusting the wrong people. Like an unwallled city, anything I had could be plundered.

Finding employment was another problem. As a woman who had been a farm wife for ten years, and a foster parent for five years, with a number of part time and temporary jobs on the side, I had no job record. My teaching career ended a year after my first marriage. I missed too many days of work. I went to school half blind because my ex-husband had broken my glasses and burned my contact lenses so God would heal me. I went to school on crutches after he severed a tendon on my foot. I went to school without lunch or money, and even had to borrow money to get home. We had a car, but only he drove it. At the end of the year, my contract was not renewed.

On my own again, I worked part-time with casual labour, then got a part time job substitute teaching. I was fired after an abusive incident with a Grade 9 class. The students hid

my purse and refused to return it. I called the police.

My next job was in a group home working with an autistic adult. I resigned after eight months. I felt my life was falling apart.

By 1993, I was on social assistance, and running a volunteer street ministry. I never wanted anyone else to be hurt as I had been.

I started selling Spare Change (now **Our Voice**) that summer. One day I walked into the office of Gordon Poschwatta, the manager, and he asked, "Do you know what it means to gain the whole world and lose your own soul?"

My soul was me. I cared for other people, but there was no one to care for me. I felt I was missing something which other people had, but since I didn't know what it was, I couldn't get it.

I have been reclaiming my soul. I wrote my terrible stories and published them under an assumed name. I had to forgive everything, even forgive myself for the things which I allowed. I betrayed myself and others, when, through my silence, I was a partner in things which were morally wrong.

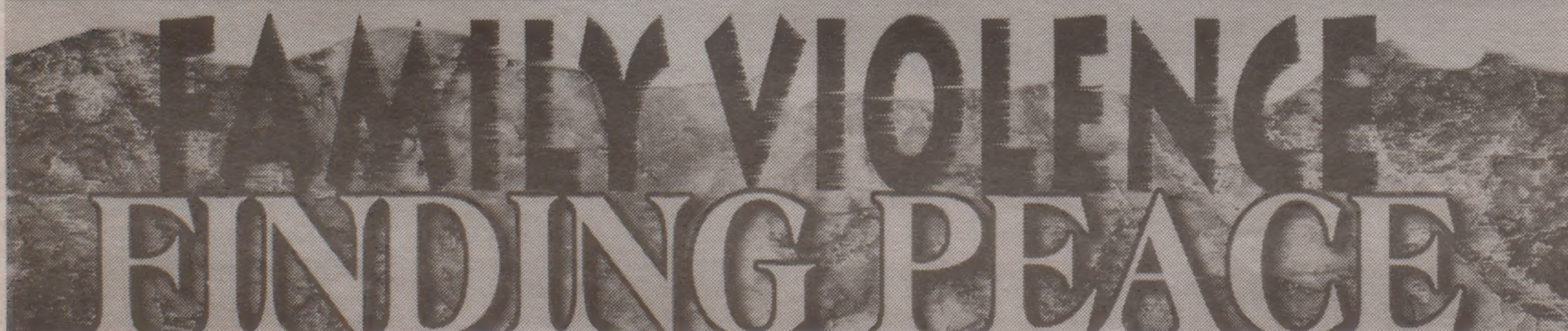
The hardest part about forgiveness is never again being able to use the past as an excuse for who I am now.

I learned to take full responsibility for my own life and my own choices.

In 1994, my social worker made an appointment with an employment counselor. I was in a panic. I didn't feel capable of holding a job. I needed more time.

I set goals for myself; the first one to get off welfare. By Dec. 1994 I was working on an ACE grant. I enrolled at Grant MacEwan college in the middle of the summer. The Journalism program was full, so I took Native Communications. I learned computer skills as well as Native culture, and history. I was awarded two scholarships, one for academic excellence, the other a Datatel scholarship which paid for part of my tuition the next year when I started journalism. In the summers, I worked as a reporter and as an editor under Student Employment grants. I graduate this spring.

I'm writing. I'm painting. I'm still working as a volunteer street worker Sundays and Wednesday evenings. Most important, I am trying to stay true to myself and to be the woman God created me to be. ♦



BY KASANDRA CALDWELL

Recently, the provincial and federal governments put out a new document, "In Unison", with a fuzzy vision to "enhance the full participation of the disabled" by increasing "work incentives" and increasing income rates as "fiscal resources permit".

Forced work fare does not exist for AISH recipients yet and disabled people fear that work fare, such as it exists presently for those on welfare, would destroy their dignity.

It has not helped people on welfare. In many cases it has forced them off of welfare into lower than poverty line wages with no medication, no dental care, no coverage for Alberta Health Care, and not enough food or clothing.

"In Unison" says there are "new societal attitudes" towards wanting the disabled to work. Does this mean that abuse of the disabled is still the norm?

By the end of the United Nation's Decade of the Disabled, attitudes toward disabled people were compassionate, but then in 1993, the cutbacks to welfare and AISH started. In 1986, AISH was at the net poverty line. Today, it is \$304/month lower.

They have saved money by taking the helpless out of needed, but costly institutions. They have promised to give them a decent living and adequate medical care, but they have reneged.

I have to look no further than my own life as an example. My disability was beyond my control, due to

A plan to force the disabled to work

Forced work fare does not exist for AISH recipients yet and disabled people fear that work fare, such as it exists for those on welfare, would destroy their dignity.

childhood abuse and a work injury.

When I started to get really ill, I had to depend on others for cheap rent, free food and kindness. My volunteer keepers wanted something pretty disgusting in return for "taking care" of me, like gratuitous sex, violence on my body, or anything degrading to my intrinsic worth. I went mad with the pain, grief, and fear that comes with being betrayed by those who are supposed to care for us.

I went on welfare for a year before going on AISH and became physically bowed with the pressure of living under financial and administrative demands.

Times have not changed much. Now the torturers

of the disabled are the leaders of Alberta and Canada.

Some think that the mentally ill can change themselves by will alone. But life is not like a week-end Anthony Robbins self-improvement course, where you break a board with your bare hands and therefore are able to break through any obstacle in life. The jelly wall of disability just shifts when you bull into it.

There has never been incentives for people on AISH to work, since AISH takes seventy-five percent of that "earned income" away.

There are rumours that the Alberta government plans to lower AISH to the level of welfare. The Premier's executive assistant says that, "instead they'll probably raise it, though not necessarily to the poverty line levels."

A cost benefit analysis of work programs would show that they are administratively

more expensive to run than just allowing non-disabled people to do the job. Also, the mentally disabled worker will get stressed and violent, or suffer dangerous levels of fatigue due to prescribed drugs.

To minimize abuse of and maximize support for the disabled people in our society, it is up to us to provoke the leaders to install a Guaranteed Annual Income, where social workers never get involved and dignity is paramount. The four agencies with clout are the Premier's office, the Premier's Counsel on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities, and the Alberta Disabilities Forum. Call them. ♦

My experience with Work Fare

It worked out that I was making much less than five dollars

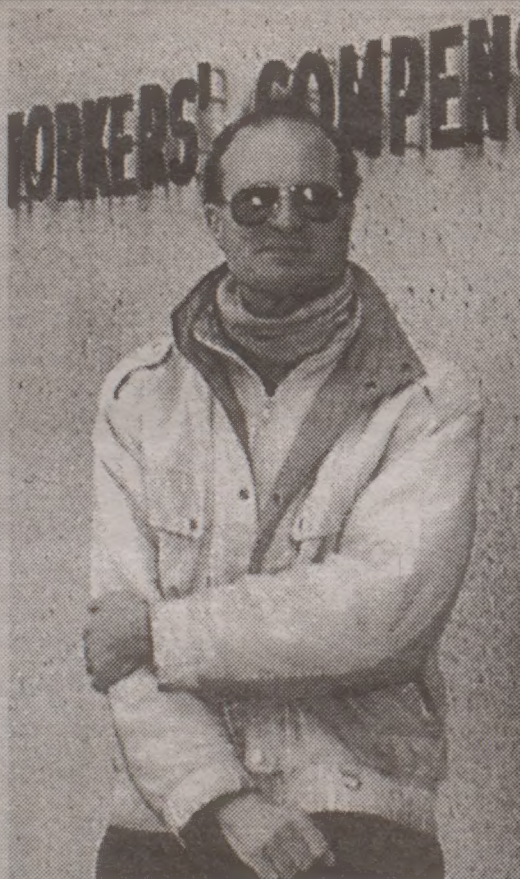
BY LAWRENCE LOYEK

I am writing about my experience when I was put on work fare. I started going to the Chrysalis society for citizens with disabilities in late fall of 1995. They were helping people get jobs while they were on social services.

I started with life skills training for three months, then I was put into job training. I was looking for landscape work and my other choice was to become a caretaker. I started doing landscaping and cleaning homes on my own in 1980. I wanted a full-time job to gain more experience and then to take a course in landscaping.

In March of 1996, Chrysalis offered me a caretaker's job at a school. I was to work for free for six weeks while I collected Social Services. I thought when we get jobs we're supposed to get off social services and then get paid a wage from the employer. This way it worked out that I was making much less than five dollars an hour. So I dropped out of the program.

In April I went to the Ability Research and Training Corporation. I went on



their three weeks of Job Hunting training. They told me I would get landscaping/caretakers work at Meadowlark Shopping Centre. My job turned out to be picking up trash from the parking lots. Every day the boss told me to go home after I'd only worked for five hours. At the end of May he let me go because he said he wasn't hiring anybody at that time. Though later one of the consultants from Ability Research told me the boss let me go because I wouldn't work an eight hour day.

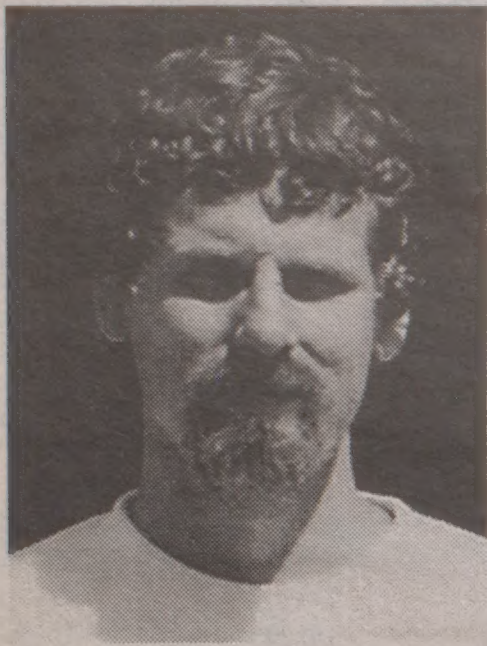
I wrote a letter to Stockwell Day who was the Social Services Minister at the time. When he wrote me back he told me to phone the supervisor of my Social Worker. When I did, she became very upset with me and said I never should have written the letter. She told me that the reason I didn't get paid was because I needed training first. I told her that everyone knows how to pick up trash. You don't need training for that.

Then I had to go back to Abilities Research in September of 1996 for a whole year program of life skills and job training and even upgrading in Math and English. That training went very well. Then in February 1997, they were going to offer me a caretaker's job in the food court at Kingsway Garden Mall. Again to work for free. I was very mad and it was the same employment consultant that I dealt with last time, the one who got me the job

picking up trash. I expressed my disappointment to him and then he took the offer away and I then feared being cut off social services.

Fortunately I met another consultant. He told me that he would help me get a landscaping job. A month later he did, at the University of Alberta. I started working there in April and was paid \$8.50/hour. I stayed there until October and planned to go back the following spring. I enjoyed the work a lot and my boss and two supervisors were very kind. ♦

Homeless Whispers in Champaign, Illinois



Homeless Whispers is possibly the smallest paper in the North American Street Newspaper Association. We have a volunteer staff of one and between one and four vendors depending on the time of year. We publish four times a year and are funded by donations and a small amount of advertising revenue. Nevertheless, we do publish roughly on schedule every spring, summer, fall and winter and, though we are small, we are comforted by the righteousness of our cause.

Champaign-Urbana, our hometown, is a typical American college town. Located in a largely rural part of Illinois, it is home to the main campus of the University of Illinois consisting of just under 40,000 students. Our vendors work mostly in the commercial district surrounding campus. This is the only part of town with any significant pedestrian traffic and it is traditionally a big area for panhandling, a problem we hope to eliminate by expanding our vendor program. Perhaps this remark requires some clarification. Being a small town, the problems of poverty and homelessness are not overwhelming in Champaign-Urbana. By and large the people we have on the street are suffering from alcoholism or mental illness. It is our hope that by actively recruiting vendors from the population of panhandlers we can bring some stability to their lives, and help them to overcome the problems they face.

On the journalistic side, *Homeless Whispers* has more ambitions than accomplishments. We have had some difficulty in recruiting writers and so have had to take what we can get. This means that we have had relatively little ability to structure the content of the paper. Hopefully, as we grow we will be able to focus the content on issues of poverty and race, that other publications in town ignore. As we are a street paper, we obviously feel that we are in a unique position to cover these areas.

Our community has been overwhelmingly supportive of our efforts to date. Both the public library and the University of Illinois library are archiving our issues. The daily newspaper has featured a biography of one of our writers, as well as excerpts from his stories. The city attorney has guaranteed our vendor's rights to sell the paper with no license requirements from the city. All in all, the future's so bright, I gotta...well, you know how the song goes. ♦

Corey Hardin
Editor of *Homeless Whispers*.

Maximum Security

From **Homeless Whispers** Champaign Illinois

by T-Bone

Pontiac, Menard, Staesville and Joliet: all maximum security penitentiaries. All housing murderers, rapists, con-artists, etc. You name the crime, you'll have a few dozen in there for that particular offense. You're surrounded by people doing 10 years to triple life, without the possibility of parole, looking into the eyes of killers. Killers who kill with no remorse, people whose minds say, I don't give a fuck about nothing or no one.

It's scary being on lockdown with a cell mate who'll never see the streets again as long as he lives. Both confined to a two by nine cell, all around you, the tension is so thick you can cut it with a knife. One argument or punch kicks off a riot. There is always a casualty. When there is no movement or "lockdown," things really get ugly.

You and your cell mate, neither of you able to get out of the cell. The space is tight. In order to get by one another, you both have to turn sideways. The only exercise is to do push-ups or a few stretches. If you're lucky, either you or your celly has a TV or radio.

A lot of inmates, who have money on the books or have some type of good hustle, will have their cells decked out. A TV, a radio or stereo--yeah, they sell stereos in the joint. Naked pictures, cards from family and friends, drawings hooked up by you or someone else. Nice gear such as suits, Nikes, Jordans, yes, if you got the money or clout you can dress as if you were on the streets. You're looking and smelling good, draped with gold, and nowhere to go. In the joint, the same as in the free world, there are about a hundred different tricks. If you have money or a good hustle, you can live very comfortably.

One of the biggest hustles, as on the streets is drugs. Drugs of all kinds: weed, hooch, cocaine, heroin, uppers, downers- you name it, you can get it. In the dope game, you can make as much money as you

would if you were on the streets. The officers are the real reason, along with visitors, why drugs are so plentiful behind the wall.

Also, just like out on the street, if you get "popped" or you catch a case, you loose good time and can get additional time. One of the most notorious reputed gang leaders was Larry Hoover, a drug dealer and a man who could call a hit on a person from inside.

Homicides also occur behind the wall of a maximum security penitentiary. One of the most common weapons is a shank, a metal object sharpened to a point that is small enough to conceal in your hand. Gambling is another big hustle. In the max joint, as in the free world, people gamble on just about everything. Cards, dice dominoes, sports on TV, sports that

go on in prison. You name it, they bet on it. If you don't pay, you'll pay in the infirmary. Debts are taken very seriously, and that's a reason that a lot of people lose their lives.

Still, the prison system has boomed, like the drug business. States are continually building

new prisons, such as the super-max, which is located in Tamms, or Jacksonville.

There are over 27,000 people locked up in Illinois alone.

If you can avoid going to prison, do so by any means necessary because to have your freedom taken away is the worst thing that can happen to you. To be told when to come out of your cell, when you can eat, when you can go outside in the yard, when to do this, when to do that. That's no way to live. From me to you: Stay free. ♦

Also in Illinois, in the great city of Chicago, there is perhaps the Grand Daddy of street papers and of social justice, *Street Wise*. Next month we will feature *StreetWise*.

the street paper movement

NASNA

The North American Street Newspaper Association www.speakeasy.org/nasna

Every so often *Our Voice* will feature other street publications from around the world. We wish to provide our readers with a look at projects like ours in other communities. Each street publication essentially has the same goal in mind, but each of us boast our own unique qualities. We will tell you a bit about the publication and publish one of their recent articles.

The street paper movement in North America and

around the world is growing and working harder and more effectively at giving voice and power to those members of our society who find themselves marginalized in any shape or form.

The mission of the North American Street Newspaper Association is to support a street newspaper movement that creates and upholds journalistic and ethical standards while promoting self-help and empowerment among people living in poverty. ♦

I thought he was a good man and we would spend the rest of our lives together...

The abuse started with jealousy. When another man would talk to me, he would get angry...

The first time he hit me was unbelievable. I thought I was going to die...

by
Rosalie

I am the mother of four beautiful children. I am also a wife who has been physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually abused. In the beginning of my relationship I believed my husband was the greatest. He was so kind to me. He made me feel so good inside. When I met him I was pregnant and very young. I was ashamed of myself at the time and I told him from the beginning that I wasn't sure if I was carrying his baby. He accepted that and we agreed that he would be the only father my son would ever know. I was so happy and proud of his decision.

I thought he was a good man and we would spend the rest of our lives together but I realized that we were not going to make it due to the abusive behavior and the abuse that our kids were living with. That is when I left him for the last time. I knew that I needed to be free; free from the abuse of drugs, alcohol and most of all the abuse of our children. I left him at the end of August 1997. When my family split up it was hard because I did not want my children to lose their dad. It was one of the hardest decisions that I have made but I know it was a good one. It was hard in the beginning. My children and I were going through a lot. We were not stable or able to deal with this on our own. It was very hard and confusing when Child Welfare apprehended my kids. I thought that was the end of the world. I was totally devastated and I had to pull myself together and start to work on myself to give my children and myself a better and safer life.

In the beginning of our life together I found that my husband slowly began to abuse me. The abuse started with jealousy. When another man would talk to me, he would get angry and argue with me. When he would fight over me I thought I was so special, believing that he loved me so much that no one else could be around me. I was so wrong!

Things got progressively worse over the months. I had my

son in June 1990. My husband began to drink a lot. I saw some of his abusive behavior then but it wasn't that bad in the beginning. After my baby boy was born it got hard for us because he was a daddy for the first time. I think that sometimes he hated the idea that the child wasn't his and it angered him. It was hard for me too because he did not tell me how he truly felt. I was very confused by his abusive behaviour. I also felt it was my fault because I wanted to be with him and fell deeply in love with him. The first time he hit me was unbelievable. I thought I was going to die.

Then we got our cheque from Social Services and he went out drinking. When he came home he was quite intoxicated and high. At the time, I could barely understand the reasons for his behavior. I was afraid and wasn't in a very good condition to protect myself or my son. I didn't know what to do when he started to beat on me. He said that I was sleeping around with my ex-boyfriend. He started to choke me. Then he grabbed a knife. I got up and ran out the door and down the hall. He was right behind me. I was screaming and crying. Our landlord opened his door to see what was going on. The landlord brought me inside and told his wife to call the police and an ambulance. During this time my husband was running around with a baseball bat with nails sticking out of the end of it. He smashed the windows of our apartment. I was taken to the hospital to get treated for hemorrhaging and because I was having trouble breathing.

After that he spent a few months in jail. When he was released I felt sorry for him. He had so many excuses and reasons why he had behaved the way he did, so I fell for it and believed him. When we got back together things went well for a little while. I felt like the only way I could be happy in the relationship was to join him in drinking and doing drugs. We seemed happy for awhile, then the abuse started again. When he hit me it didn't seem to matter if I was pregnant or not. It always seemed to be worse when we were having hard times. In January, 1992, I had a daughter. She was a stillbirth baby. I had a lot to deal with at that time because I was alone. My husband had left me for another woman. I decided that the best thing to do was to leave him alone. We were apart for about 5 months. In that time I had gotten a place for my son and I to live. I got some counseling and was trying to get my life back. It was hard because I missed my husband so much. I eventually went back to him. He gave me so many reasons and excuses why he had behaved the way he did. I really believed he was sorry. Then he reverted to the old ways of abuse.

We had decided that we needed to spend some time on our

...continued

A story
of escape
and
recovery.

POVERTY IN ACTION

990-1840 10874-97 Street, Edmonton, AB

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POVERTY IN ACTION

own, so we moved to Saskatoon. We lived there for 2 months and got married. It was a hard decision to marry him. I did love and care about him a lot, but it was the last thing I wanted to do. I knew that he'd have gotten mad at me if I refused his proposal, but deep down I knew I was not ready for such a big commitment. I was feeling a lot of pressure because I was pregnant. So I married him. After we got married things were good for a while. When our son (Brandyn) was born I thought I did something wrong because he had no thumbs. Later I learned that this was genetic. We split-up again because he cheated on me with my best friend. It killed me inside. I left him shortly after and cheated on him. It was my revenge.

I was very ashamed of myself. I was slowly falling

I was very ashamed of myself. I was slowly falling apart inside. We eventually got back together and nothing changed.

apart inside. We eventually got back together and nothing changed. We went back to our normal routine of abuse. I always felt that he over did it when he would use my cheating against me and how he had a good excuse to have cheated on me. Three years went

until I got pregnant again. I felt like most of the time it was my fault that he would get angry and abuse me because I would be grouchy and miserable to him. I understand that even though I was moody, I did not deserve to be abused and neither did our children. So I decided that I wanted more out of life for me and my kids and not to suffer with any more abuse of any kind. I knew it was going to be hard to leave him. I would sit and think about it but it was so hard to bring myself to do it. When I left him, I still loved him because

we shared a lot together, but I knew I had to break free. I wanted to be free so I could experience things that I had only dreamed of. I wanted to get some drug and alcohol counseling. I'm planning to go back to school for some upgrading this coming fall. I'm in the process of getting some experience to help me get a good reliable job. My main goal right now is to get my kids back and fulfill all of their dreams for the future. I feel like I'm succeeding in reaching my goals slowly but it will improve in time. Being in Poundmakers Treatment Centre was one of the best things I've done for myself. Today, I'm doing some volunteer work for Poverty in Action. I am working hard on myself, so I can get my children back from Child Welfare. Losing them was terrible, but the creator knew that I needed some time to work on myself so I can be a better person and mother. ♦

Rosalie prefers to remain anonymous. She submitted her story of recovery and finding peace through Poverty in Action.

Y2K - Y2K - Y2K - Y2K - Y2K - Y2K - Y2K

Icing on the Millennial Cake

BY TOOKER GOMBERG

Outside my window the world rests peacefully under a thick blanket of freshly fallen snow. It's 22 below, and I savour being snug and warm.

A year ago, eastern Canada was hit by the worst natural disaster in our history drawing emergency resources from across the country to restore basic necessities. At the height of the ice storm, 3 million Canadians were without power - in the dead of winter.

As I look forward, the millennium bug bites my consciousness, reminding me of our collective vulnerability to failures of technology.

"More than one-third of the most important (government) systems won't be fixed in time" states the U.S. House Panel Y2K report of September 1998. And, due to Y2K concerns, Canada's RCMP will not allow vacations from late December 1999 to the middle of March 2000.

We like to think we're invincible - just as the Titanic was unsinkable. But if Y2K hits hard, we may have only ourselves, and our neighbours and communities, to rely upon. Why not be

ready, just in case?

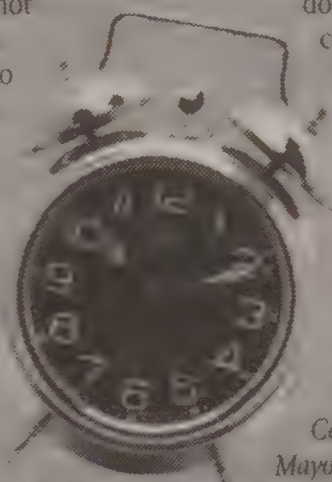
Hundreds of groups around North America have begun taking precautions and are organizing on a neighbourhood basis. In Edmonton, we have been meeting to begin talking about people's concerns, to hope for the best, and to prepare for the worst.

Officials in Britain are urging people to stock up with two weeks' emergency food rations in anticipation of Y2K-related shortages. What could we do to keep warm if the electricity and natural gas stops flowing? I don't know if that is likely, but I do know that it is possible. As a Boy Scout I learned the motto: Be Prepared.

While a few people are grabbing guns and heading for the hills, my hope is that citizens grab spades and start planting gardens in the spring. During the war, some countries planted Victory Gardens to help feed the people. Why not start a massive program of Millennium Gardens this spring to help ensure that there will be enough to eat locally? Elders could help teach young 'uns the tricks of tending the vegetable patch, and how to can and store food for the winter.

The millennium bug may shut down the power, but we could be ready. And in preparing we build strength in neighbourliness. Come the new millennium, we may be powerless, or we could be reinvigorated with the power and joy of increased self-sufficiency. The choice is ours. ♦

Former Edmonton City Councillor and candidate for Mayor, Tooker Gomberg raises concerns about Y2K.



We're here for you.

A part of your neighbourhood - the Northeast Community Health Centre.

We open our doors on January 27th to begin a new era of health care. Created with your input, this truly is your Health Centre - designed to work best for you. We will work with you, your family, and friends to provide the necessary care and services to keep your neighbourhood healthy.

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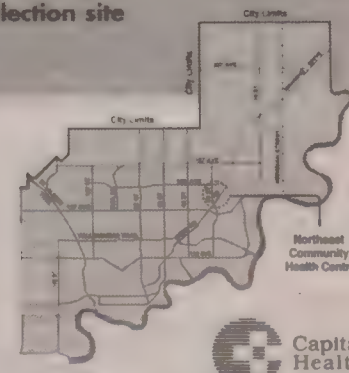
- Family Health, including doctors, nurses, social worker and other health professionals
- Mental Health services and workers
- Child and Adolescent Health services including pediatrician, nurses and other health professionals
- Relocation of all Clareview Public Health programs and services including immunization/well child clinics, pre-school speech and language services and pre- and post-natal services
- Laboratory collection site

Initial hours of operation are 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Emergency and specialists services will be available in Spring 1999.

Northeast Community Health Centre
14007 - 50 Street (50 Street and Manning Drive)
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472-5000

Please note: The Northeast Community Health Centre is a non-smoking centre and property.



Poetry by Lance Sanders

Lance Sanders is an Edmonton poet who has written thousands of poems on scraps of paper. His work has been published in Our Voice before.

Godspeed

Give me peace,
give me death,
let me struggle
for last breath.

Time,
it has many wonders
and yearning hurts
trust me now
old man to come,
for I see in you
a new dead man begun.

Love the Christian Dollar

Brother can you spare me a dime,
cruel todays, cruel tomorrows.
Here I am practically crying.
Stranded on the streets of my demise.
Brother spare me that dime.
I need to eat today.
Help the poor man,
undrunk
seemingly forever stuck.

Strike me Mute

Colour me blind.
I have seen beauty
grasped
in the corner of your
smiles.
Let us
abide each other's time
for awhile.

Caring.
It is your way,
your eyes
in which I bask and
sway.
My heart says
I need your love today.

Animal

Time enough
is love
beyond yourself
so
leave it all alone.

Sanctuary
sits high.
Let the umbrella
make the element hot.

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Fighting the Odds

NEW
FICTION
PART ONE

STOCK
ILLUSTRATION

PART ONE of a new serialized story
by Allison Kydd

When Hope Morrisey's husband told her he was leaving and the door thudded behind him, it seemed as if her troubles had finally come to an end. Now she could get on with her life, she thought. But, somehow, it didn't turn out to be quite that simple.

At first she did feel as if a weight had been lifted. For years she'd tense up at 4:30 every afternoon, just knowing he'd soon be home from work and of course he wouldn't like the way she spent her day. She always had to guess what kind of mood he'd be in and whether he'd spend the evening at home for a change or be going out with his pals.

There were other reasons for the feeling of relief: no more fuss if the spaghetti was sticky from being in the pot too long; nobody to criticize the way she wore her hair or to make her feel like a slut if she had a run in her pantyhose. And no more costly surprises -- he meant well, but whenever he tried to do something special it just meant there were more bills to pay.

There was the time he'd gone out and bought a houseful of furniture, on credit. She'd known there wouldn't be the money to pay the monthly installments. After all, she was the one who wrote the cheques and hoped against hope they wouldn't bounce. It made her feel like such a low-life when cheques came back from the bank all covered with black ink and "not sufficient funds" stamped across them like dirty words on wash-room walls.

In fact, she spent most of their marriage just waiting for the other shoe to drop. There were the times when he came home with a pink slip in his hand and a story that somehow made it not his fault. She began to expect disaster, and all the stories began to sound familiar. Maybe he'd sworn at his boss (who was a jerk who never kept

his promises), or maybe there'd been some pushing and shoving which ended up with somebody getting hurt. Though her man was never the one who started a brawl, he was still the one who ended up losing his job over it, who broke his hand when he punched someone or who was disabled in some other way.

In the early years, Hope was always loyal, indignant that there were so many stupid bosses and other ordinary jerks just trying to make trouble, though she wished her man didn't always have to be in the thick of it. Filling out income tax forms got more complicated to do every year because there were so many job changes and always some necessary paperwork missing. It so was hard to keep track of so many different records of employment.

But that wasn't the worst of it. After ten years of marriage, Hope wasn't so ready to believe everything her husband told her. Yet, in spite of the fact she could see all the stupid things he did, he still managed to make her feel as if she was the dumb one in the family. Dumb. Helpless. Like she couldn't do anything about it and couldn't do anything right.

Sometimes she thought about getting a job herself. At least that way she could pay the bills. But who would hire her? She had no job record, hadn't worked for over ten years. There was nothing to prove that she was any good. So what if she'd been smart at school. Besides, a lot of those report cards had said she "wasn't working up to potential." That had been like the story of her life.

Besides, she thought, in those days, what would be the point of getting a job anyway? If there was more money her husband would just spend more, like it burned a hole in his pocket.

Once, when they were newly weds, they'd seen an Anthony Quinn movie in which the lovable hero couldn't stick with a job, though he seemed to have lots of talents, and loads of charisma. His wife (Ireni Papas in the movie) finally gave every penny she'd managed to scrape together over their years of marriage just to send him on trip to

Greece, because it was his dream. So, there wasn't much chance that Hope's man would change. Obviously, he was one of the type who never did. And as the years went on he got to be less and less lovable.

The last and maybe the most important reason Hope didn't go to work was she didn't want to leave the kids alone with him. Not that she was afraid he'd hurt them, not physically anyway. Rather, she was afraid he'd take them away from her. They'd had a lot of what he called "little disagreements" by then. That meant he either started hitting her or told her he would hit her. Whenever she said she couldn't stand it anymore, that she wanted to break up, he said, "Then you'll never see your kids again."

"But why stay together?" she pleaded. "You're not happy anymore; I'm not happy. Why can't we just get away from each other and start again?"

Even when he didn't hit her, because he thought she must have a boyfriend to be saying such things, the discussions always ended the same way. "Shut up, you bitch, you whore, or I'll shut you up!" And even though she did shut up when he said that, he hit her anyway, unless the kids were around of course. It wasn't very often that he hit her in front of the kids, or anywhere people could see, like on her face. Her body wasn't so lucky. After all, he was the only one who would see her naked.

For the first few years they were married, he hadn't hit her very much. Not unless she gave him a reason to be jealous, like mentioned the name of an old boyfriend. Back in those days, he always felt really bad after it happened, so she'd try to hide the bruises even from him. After all, by the time it took for the bruises to really show, he was being oh so sweet to her again and neither of them wanted to remember.

to be continued...

This is part one of a new short story by Allison Kydd, an Edmonton writer and a long-time contributor to Our Voice. Watch for part two in the March issue.

JOHN'S STYLE FILE

Muriel Stanley Venne

John Zapantis
Our Voice vendor, writer and
photographer meets the most
interesting people.

Muriel Stanley Venne is a Metis woman, a human rights activist and a devoted champion of social justice.

Muriel's been sitting on the board of the Alberta Human Rights Commission for more than twenty-five years.

Muriel Stanley Venne is the President and founder of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women in Edmonton. Muriel is also involved with three other major aboriginal organizations here in Edmonton.

One of Muriel's responsibilities as an aboriginal women's rights activist is to raise awareness of where a victim stands with their human rights when subjected to abuse that includes, spousal assault and all elements of discrimination.

Muriel's initial step is to personally justify issues on behalf of abused women and to then refer them to proper help agencies that will work toward resolving any grievances brought forward.

Muriel is a knowledgeable representative of women's issues and understands the extremely high levels of abuse toward aboriginal women.

"If there is an aboriginal woman in this province who hasn't been abused, I'd like to meet her. Most all of the aboriginal women



including myself have been abused. They are survivors," she says.

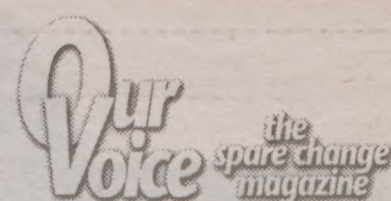
To further assist abused women, Muriel will often give an abused woman a free copy of the Path Finder of Alberta, a twenty-eight page booklet containing two hundred and forty-one human rights amendments explaining what rights a victim of abuse is entitled to. As well it outlines the initial steps to take and what self help agencies to consult when voicing a complaint.

Our Voice asked Muriel Stanley Venne, "what words of advice would you give to a young native woman who'd one day aspire to walk in your shoes?"

"My advise would be to never give up because there are a lot of barriers that you're going to encounter. Take a positive attitude, no matter how difficult things are, because you'll achieve your objective."

If you are a troubled aboriginal woman and need the assistance of a Human Rights Activist, contact Muriel Stanley Venne of the I.A.A.W. Suite 1- 11205-101 Street. Edmonton AB. T5G 2A4 or call 479-8195. Fax. 471-2169. ♦

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CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

Deanna Shorten

Deanna is a mother of four children. She is one of the coordinators of Poverty In Action. Aside from that she volunteers on the Quality of Life Commission and works with inner city children. She has spent tireless hours assisting people living in poverty toward better circumstances while she struggles by on little income. Thank you and congratulations to Deanna. ♦



Café Mosaics



Our Voice Magazine
and Café Mosaics'
Citizen of the Month

EVERY MONTH in Our Voice, we will be featuring someone who has gone the extra mile in their lives or in their careers to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

The Citizen of the Month will receive a dinner for two courtesy of the Garneau Café Mosaics on Whyte Avenue.

Next month in

- CELEBRATION OF WOMEN
- LOOKING AT SOCIAL UNION
- HUMAN RIGHTS FORGOTTEN, NOW THE CONFERENCE IS OVER



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Groups start every five weeks.

Next group begins February 3, 1999.

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IN EDMONTON

Linda Dumont

BY JOHN ZAPANTIS

Veteran Our Voice vendor Linda Dumont is publicly recognized as one of the first people to sell Our Voice.

Linda has been selling Our Voice since July of 1993 when it was formerly affiliated with Spare Change in Vancouver.

Linda is a multi-talented writer, photographer, poet, cartoonist and a paint and sketch artist.

For Linda, vending covers her basic needs.

"I guess when you feel you have the money to buy the things you need, it helps you survive. I've met a lot of people, who have been important in other ways. I've made some friends, and opportunities have come my way through meeting people when vending the paper," she says.



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- I will be polite to all members of the public
- I will vend only in areas that are authorized

IN WINNIPEG

Debbie Roberts

BY RODNEY GRAHAM

Debbie Roberts has been selling Our Voice in the Wolsely district of Winnipeg for over a month now.

"I feel better about myself selling Our Voice. It gets me out in the fresh air and I really enjoy it," she says. "I work every day, usually I can sell ten or twelve papers in a couple of hours in an afternoon. It's been too cold to stay out for long though."

"My disability social assistance is not enough," she said. "I can't afford anything. I think God has blessed me with being able to sell Our Voice."



THE GROWING GAP

In 1999, Canada is faced with greater numbers of poor, the elimination of the middle class and an increasingly rich elite. There is also no concrete action by our governments to seriously deal with changing the growing poverty in our society.

Interview with author Armine Yalnizyan
by Dale Ladouceur

Last October, Toronto's Centre for Social Justice released a report on the growing gap between the rich and the poor in Canada. The Growing Gap Project was the first major project from the Centre for Social Justice that was founded in 1997.

Lead researcher Armine Yalnizyan researched and wrote the report for the Centre and will be in Edmonton speaking at the "Poverty Amidst Plenty" conference. This conference was organised by the Parkland Institute, and will be held at the Timms Centre for the Arts at the U of A March 4 - 6. Other speakers include Duncan Cameron, president of Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Bill Phipps, moderator of the United Church of Canada. Ms. Yalnizyan spoke to Our Voice from Toronto on the report and the upcoming conference.

"I've got it in my blood" laughs Yalnizyan, "I've been doing this kind of work on economic and social justice for as long as I've had a degree in economics. Wherever I've been able to apply my training I've been doing this sort of thing."

Yalnizyan has done previous studies and reports on

a variety of topics like income distribution which looked at the intersection between what the market delivers to people in terms of their ability to earn a living and what government policies do to create a context for people to work. "It was a pretty natural outgrowth of work that I had done before," explains Yalnizyan, "but (this report) is far more comprehensive. I think it is a useful resource that has a shelf-life of a couple of years."

Ten years ago both federal and provincial governments signed a document to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. In 1999 Canada is faced with greater numbers of poor, the elimination of the middle class, and a rich elite. There is also no concrete action by our governments to seriously deal with changing the growing poverty in our society.

Alberta has been on the cutting edge of hacking social services budgets. User fees, minimum wage, and cut services to the elderly, disabled and youth all help increase the gap between the rich and poor. The standard of living has continually decreased in the last three decades with people working longer for less money. Families are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, especially since the national child care program that the federal government promised

kept pace with inflation and population growth.

"I had anticipated that it would be a much clearer story to tell," explains Yalnizyan "because of what I had seen up until the 1991 data. I assumed that 1991-96 would be a very clear trend to a growing gap because it had seemed to be headed in that direction. What I was surprised by was the degree to which it was [reduced] despite the recession in 1991."

Yalnizyan goes on to explain some of the challenges in researching her report. "If you take a look at any international data, Canada is cited as one of the beacons in the industrialised world for either stabilising or reducing income disparities. I knew I was contracted to do a story on the growing gap but I couldn't find that story until the 1996 data came out."

"[In the 1996 data], marketing clearly tells the story," continues Yalnizyan, "which is a person's earnings from all forms of employment and all your returns from any investments - that's market income. So it clearly shows, no matter how you slice or dice it, that the gap is growing at a phenomenal pace."

"We don't just live in a market," muses Yalnizyan, "though there are a lot of people that would like us to be moving in that direction. To an extent that the social programs are still there; like unemployment insurance and welfare programs, it was fascinating to me to see how much of a role they played in filling the holes that the market was leaving behind."

"If you look at transfers, [total incomes including what you get from the state], there is marginal growth there too. Once you take everything into account, what's left in your pocket, what you've earned, what governments have provided, to the extent that they've provided anything, and the taxes - that gap was shrinking until 1994 and it turned around and grew at the most alarming rate since then."

Registration for the conference varies: before February 19th low income people can attend for \$25, regular is \$50 and

institutional is \$75 if you are a member of the Parkland Institute, [it is slightly higher if you are a non-member]. After the 19th the registration fee increases by only a few dollars. Contact the Parkland Institute at 492 8558 or parkland@ualberta.ca. ♦

ARMINE YALNIZYAN

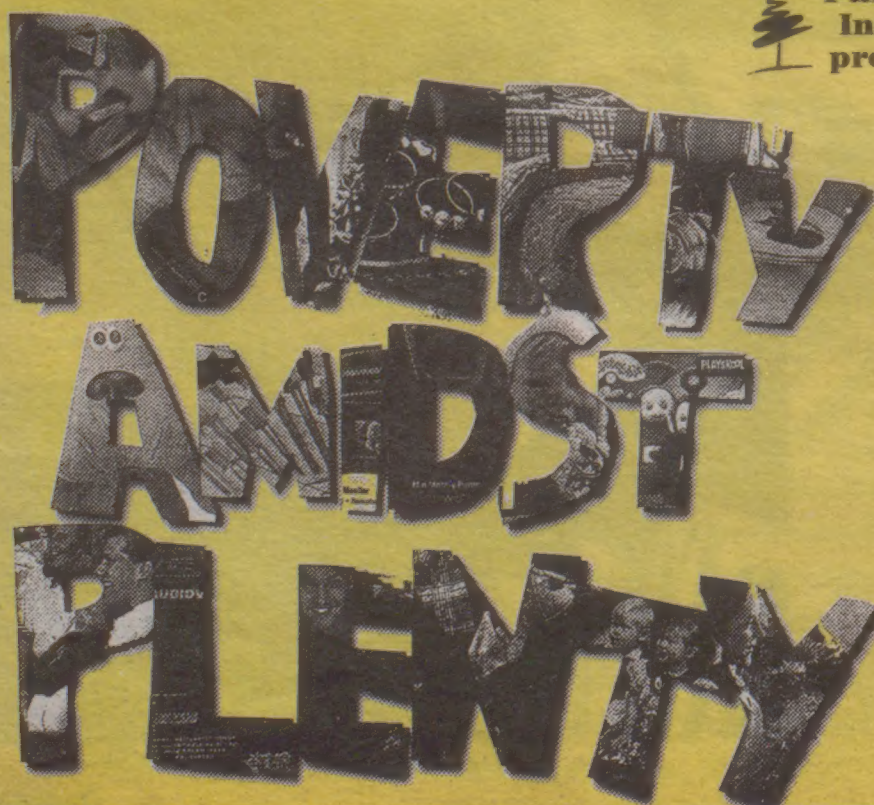
Author of *The Growing Gap Report*


"Once you take everything into account, what's left in your pocket, what you've earned, what governments have provided, to the extent that they've provided anything, and the taxes - that gap was shrinking until 1994 and it turned around and grew at the most alarming rate since then."



has not become a reality.

At the same time as the social slashing, corporations are making record amounts of money. Ralph Klein has talked about a "reinvestment in education, health care and social services" but Parkland research has shown how these so called reinvestment have not



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